



Compromise on NASA Authorization Clears

In a last-minute compromise, an ambitious NASA reauthorization bill cleared Congress Oct. 21 and headed for an uncertain fate on President Reagan's desk.

The bill (S 2209) calls for spending nearly \$6 billion in fiscal 1989-91 for a proposed manned space station, leaves in limbo administration plans to subsidize a privately owned, rent-a-shelf mini-station and creates an advisory National Space Council — an idea that in 1986 prompted a pocket veto.

In general ways, it also endorses aggressive manned exploration of the solar system outside of Earth's orbit and unmanned probes far beyond.

Congressional aides said it was unclear whether Reagan would sign the bill (S 2209). A NASA official said some provisions were objectionable but that other long-sought provisions may outweigh those objections.

The House approved the bill by voice vote Oct. 19. It had been unclear whether the Senate would accept the final version until it approved the measure Oct. 21, also by voice vote.

As the session was drawing to a close, it had become increasingly doubtful that House and Senate negotiators on S 2209 would compromise. House Science Committee Chairman Robert A. Roe, D-N.J., was holding out for a full-blown three-year authorization for the space agency, while his counterpart in the Senate, Commerce Committee Chairman Ernest F. Hollings, D-S.C., was not yet ready to commit to a three-year plan.

The version passed by the House June 2 (HR 4561 — H Rept 100-650) included fiscal 1989-91 authorizations, exceeding President Reagan's out-year estimates by \$2.7 billion. The version passed by the Senate Aug. 9 (S 2209 — S Rept 100-429) included no multi-year authorizations. (*Weekly Report* pp. 2271, 1532)

The compromise includes fiscal 1989 authorizations of \$11.2 billion, dropping all multi-year authorizations except one for the space station, which the administration had requested. Reagan's budget requested \$11.5 billion for

—By Phil Kuntz

Bill Leaves Undecided Fate of Private Station

NASA, which the House bill authorized; the Senate's authorized \$11.1 billion. Under NASA's appropriations bill (HR 4800 — PL 100-404), the agency will actually get only \$10.7 billion in fiscal 1989. (*Weekly Report* p. 2434)

In giving in on most of the multi-year authorizations, Roe managed to get a key concession: The bill would require NASA to submit two-year funding requests starting with its fiscal 1990 budget. Roe and colleagues on the Science Committee favor the multi-year approach as a way of bringing a measure of stability and constant growth to the space program.

Long-Range Plans

Rep. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., chairman of the Space Subcommittee, used the Soviet Union to illustrate the committee's point of view in a floor speech. The U.S.S.R., he said, is ahead in some aspects of the space race because "the Soviets have had that consistent funding increase over the years ... whereas the American program ... has had the fits and starts."

The compromise also dropped House provisions requiring seven detailed "five-year capital development plans" that would have forced NASA to commit itself to a slew of far-reaching goals endorsed by the Science Committee, including a U.S.-Soviet manned mission to Mars.

In keeping with Roe's insistence on long-range goals and planning, however, it retained provisions requiring one overall five-year capital-improvement plan and five 10-year "strategic" plans. The bill also contains several reach-for-the-stars provisions in which Congress implicitly or explicitly endorses manned "space settlements," moon outposts, manned missions to Mars and elsewhere in the solar system, and the "robotic" exploration of other solar systems.

Funding the bill's goals for NASA's \$20 billion-plus manned

space station will surely be one of next year's most heated budget battles, just as it was this year. NASA ended up getting \$900 million of the nearly \$1 billion it had requested for the station, but it was a tough fight. The authorization bill calls for more than \$2 billion in 1990 and close to \$3 billion in 1991.

Those targets will be difficult, if not impossible, to reach. NASA competes in its spending bill with a number of other popular causes, including housing and the environment. With both parties' presidential candidates touting pro-environment stances and Democratic housing advocates championing at the bit to reverse the housing budget cuts of the Reagan era, NASA may be forced to take a back seat. To succeed, space advocates in Congress — a sizable block of members — will have to exert considerable influence.

The authorization bill appears to put to rest for this year and leave in doubt until next year the linchpin of Reagan's space commercialization policy — the so-called commercially developed space facility.

Proposed by a politically well-connected Houston firm, Space Industries Inc., the idea of a relatively tiny private space station was endorsed by Reagan when his policy was announced Feb. 11. Under the proposal, the government would be the prime tenant for five years at a cost of up to \$700 million. Authorizers put the brakes on the idea earlier this year.

But the administration hoped senators would go along with House language allowing NASA to request bid proposals on the idea from different companies. The Senate refused. The bill requires further study of the idea.

Also frustrating the administration will be the space-council provision, a more detailed version of which President Reagan cited as one of his prime reasons for pocket-vetoing the fiscal 1987 NASA authorization bill. He said the council would create "additional and unnecessary bureaucracy." (1986 *Almanac* p. 330)

Since then, both parties' presidential candidates have endorsed the idea, which may ease Reagan's objection. ■